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SUBJECT: MORE DISPLACED KAREN SEEK SHELTER ALONG THAI-BURMA BORDER

REF: CHIANG MAI 181 (CONCERNS OVER SPDC OFFENSIVE IN KAREN STATE)

¶1. Despite continued reports of increased attacks on and displacement of civilians in Burma's Karen State, few have crossed into Thailand, according to a National Intelligence Agency (NIA) representative in Mae Sariang district.

¶2. The NIA contact estimated that 2,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are now gathered at Ei Tu Ko and Ei Tu Tha on the Burmese side of the Salween River opposite Mae Sariang, including a group of about 100 that arrived at the end of November. These numbers correspond with reports by the Irrawaddy online news service and the Free Burma Rangers relief organization that Burma Army operations in Karen State have driven thousands more civilians toward the Thai border.

¶3. Under long-standing Thai government policy, IDPs are not permitted to cross into Thailand as long as they are unharmed on the Burma side. Thai contacts in the area claim that those involved, from the Karen National Union (KNU) to relief agencies, seem satisfied with the current application of this policy.

¶4. According to the Mae Sariang-based NIA contact, these recent border developments follow a familiar pattern seen since November-December last year (reftel). Burma Army attacks on ethnic Karen villagers in the Nyaunglebin-Toungoo area, possibly to "clear the area" for the new capital Naypyidaw, he speculated, have displaced thousands. He reported that the IDP group has access to relief assistance from some EU countries, is protected by KNU soldiers and has so far faced no intimidation from regime troops. However KNU counterparts have told him that more villagers from the two districts are headed toward the border.

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